

UNIMAGINABLE BODIES

Intellectual Disability, Performance and Becomings

Anna Catherine Hickey-Moody, University of Sydney, Australia

Unimaginable Bodies radically resituates academic discussions of intellectual disability. Through building relationships between philosophy, cultural studies and communities of integrated dance theatre practice, Anna Hickey-Moody argues that dance theatre devised with and performed by young people with and without intellectual disability, can reframe the ways in which bodies with intellectual disability are known. This proposition is considered in terms of classic philosophical ideas of how we think the mind and body, as Hickey-Moody argues that dance theatre performed by young people with and without intellectual disability creates a context in which the intellectually disabled body is understood in terms other than those that pre-suppose a Cartesian mind-body dualism. Taking up the writings of Spinoza and Deleuze and Guattari, Hickey-Moody critiques aspects of medical discourses of intellectual disability, arguing that Cartesian methods for thinking about the body are recreated within these discourses. Further, she shows that Cartesian ways of conceiving corporeality can be traced through select studies of the social construction of intellectual disability. The argument for theorising corporeality and embodied knowledge that Hickey-Moody constructs is a philosophical interpretation of the processes of knowledge production and subjectification that occur in integrated dance theatre. Knowledge produced within integrated dance theatre is translated into thought in order to explore the affective nature of performance texts. This book is essential reading for those interested in theories of embodiment, disability studies and dance.

To move beyond the theory and practice divide, to leave the mind-body distinction behind us, to affirm lives rather than negate them, are among the most wise principles of our age. They are lessons learned from Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari: we still do not know what bodies can do, because we still think of bodies and minds in restrictive and hierarchical ways. Yet few, very few works push through to the other side or even show us what it might look like, instead of merely preparing a cerebral path, and in so doing falling back into older modes of thinking and outdated cultural models. The great achievement of Anna Hickey-Moody's book on intellectual disabilities, dance and philosophy is then to have shown us a way to truly think of disability as ability, creatively, within multiple cultures and in changing environments. In offering a thoughtful, sensitive and genuinely practical immersion in the work of the Restless dance ensemble, she puts Deleuze and Guattari's concepts to work so that we may not only understand them, but also discover a world where they find a setting suited to a novel emphasis on multiple differences resistant to simple ordering and judgement. This allows for a powerful critique of medical discourses in their reliance on terminologies based around impairment and lack. Hickey-Moody demonstrates the cost of defining levels of ability against norms and around the concept of wholeness. More importantly, though, thanks to her work on dance she shifts the academic, political and ethical frame for living in a world of different abilities away from classification and coping, and towards forms of affirmation sensitive to the power to challenge limits embodied by senses, affects and ideas. This book will change disciplines, not only because it makes us think in new ways, but because it releases minds and bodies too long devalued in bygone ones.

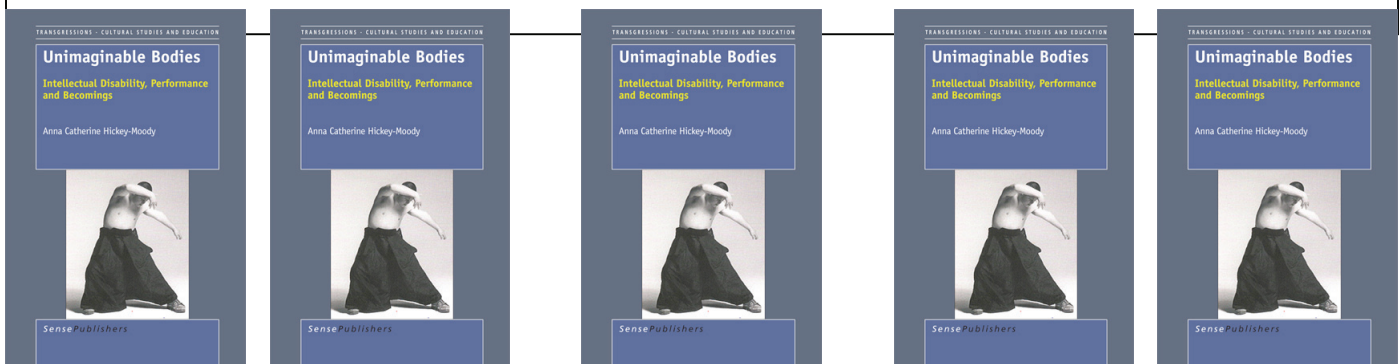
Professor James Williams, the University of Dundee

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Unimaginable Bodies draws on the thought of Spinoza, and Deleuze and Guattari, in novel ways in order to confront medical and sociological categories of intellectual disability. When this philosophical approach is coupled with Hickey-Moody's fascinating reflections on her work with Restless Dance Company, the result is a work that deftly criss-crosses theory and practice, intellect and corporeality, and aesthetics and ethics. This vital and empowering book promises to transform mundane sense(s) of ability and disability.

Professor Moira Gatens, *University of Sydney*

'Unimaginable Bodies is an indispensable study that deepens our understanding of disability and corporeality — and offers us a luminous reframing of long-standing questions about bodies, ethics, senses, movement, and power.'

Gerard Goggin, *University of New South Wales, Australia*

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